

*Editorial***The Most Important Questions**

The field of human verbal behavior challenges us with the most mysterious, the most complex, the most profound, the most important questions about human beings. This journal, *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior*, continues in its role as the sole specialized outlet for original research in this critically important area within the field of behavior analysis.

The rather modest growth of the functional analysis of verbal behavior is understandable given our remarkable successes in the analysis of nonverbal behavior. The early and continuing successes in the laboratory and the later successes in the applied domain combine to produce an achievement unmatched in the history of psychological science.

The conspicuous and successful application of behavior analysis to previously intractable problems of nonverbal behavior, such as those often found in developmental disabilities, autism, and special education, may have led to the impression among those outside behavior analysis that the study of verbal behavior has been conceded to other fields. A casual survey of job notices will show that positions are more often available for behavior analysts to work with nonverbal behavior problems, but are rare if the job is an academic position involving work in the areas of “cognition” or “language.”

In recent years, of course, behavior analysts have moved increasingly into the establishment, maintenance, and extension of verbal repertoires with individuals in the traditional areas of application noted above. Here again, the successes have been impressive indeed, and there is much room for growth in both the basic science and applications.

Developments in other areas of ver-

bal behavior indicate an emerging diversity of research topics. Examples include basic and applied research in equivalence relations and derived relational phenomena, research in the development of verbal repertoires with children in contexts outside the laboratory, and the development of various laboratory preparations. Yet the study of most issues regarding language remain dominated by other disciplines: linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive psychology. Interestingly, some researchers in these fields are turning to research themes that involve questions of function and context.

Behavior analysis is poised to enter the fray, and the sooner the better, because everything that distinguishes the human species, from its crowning achievements to its darkest pathology, is fundamentally verbal in nature. In 64 years of behavior-analytic science, we’ve learned a great deal about the processes and contingencies that govern the behavior of organisms, but the larger challenges of the field of verbal behavior remain before us.

*The Analysis of Verbal Behavior* will continue to contribute to the advancement of the field by publishing original articles reporting empirical research, both basic and applied, as well as interpretive analyses. Papers that propose effective methodological practices are particularly encouraged. The papers published in this issue attest to the relevance, vitality, and diversity of work now being done in the functional analysis of verbal behavior. In my capacity as editor, I would like to dedicate Volumes 18 through 20 to the patient readership of this journal, in whose hands the future of behavior analysis, and with it all of its contributions to the future of humanity, may very well rest.

The challenges that confront the expansion of behavior analysis into the full range of human verbal phenomena are many and difficult, but they are challenges that must be faced. At the present stage of advanced development of behavior-analytic science, many im-

portant questions remain, of course, but there can be little doubt that the most important questions about human beings are questions about verbal behavior.

Sam Leigland  
Editor